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## LONG-TERM RESULTS OF THE PLAY IT SMART PROGRAM

### THESIS

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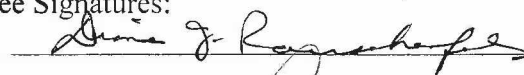
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## Chapter 1

Unnecessary numbers of college-recruited high school student-athletes do not meet National Collegiate Athletic Association initial eligibility requirements or do meet the base criteria yet are inadequately prepared for college-level coursework (Davis, 2009). The NCAA Division I and II eligibility standards mandate a minimum C average for core courses, in combination with a satisfactory score on the sliding scale for college entrance exams (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2010). Still, minimum high school eligibility in most states can be attained each semester while failing one or two courses and passing the remainder of classes with D's (Reide, 2006). This gap in expectations and eligibility policy makes it challenging for at-risk student-athletes to be well-equipped for life after high school and higher education without additional guidance.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to explore the academic and sociological impact of participation in the National Football Foundation's Play It Smart Program, an educational program that places trained academic coaches to mentor high school football teams in at-risk or under-served communities across the United States.

### **Background**

The National Football Foundation's mission statement is "to promote the power of amateur football in developing the qualities of leadership, sportsmanship, competitive zeal and the drive for academic excellence in America's young people." The Play It Smart Program was created in 1998 to further implement this mission by placing trained academic coaches in economically disadvantaged high schools throughout America. The

Play It Smart academic coach works throughout the school year, not just in season, to provide academic support services, mentorship, additional guidance, and teach life skills and character development. In doing so, the Play It Smart Program does not focus on achieving minimum athletic eligibility but aspires for student-athletes to reach for greatness. Consequently, the academic coach works to cultivate transferrable skills learned in the athletic arena, like leadership and determination, into skills that can be applied toward academic excellence in the classroom.

By motivating student-athletes to perform at their highest level in school, this mindset can also transform into other areas of their lives. Similar results have surfaced in Rosenthal and Jacobson's original 1968 study of the Pygmalion effect motivational theory that when more is expected of students, more is achieved (Buryanek, 2010). Therefore, the Play It Smart Program trains its academic coaches how to effectively motivate and provide guidance to at-risk student-athletes in under-served communities.

Funding for the Play It Smart Program is primarily received through grants, corporate sponsors, and private donations; therefore, the school system is not expected to budget the overhead costs for the program. Each high school must file a comprehensive application to the National Football Foundation for consideration to receive the Play It Smart Program. The upfront obligation of each school is to provide the academic coach with office space, classroom usage, computer access, and a regularly set time to work with the student-athletes who participate in football.

In order to guide the implementation of the program at each school, Play It Smart selected six areas of focus for academic coaches when categorizing data. While the program does not have a "cookie cutter" curriculum, these measures of success are

necessary in order to provide clear program targets nationwide. The six measures of success are as follows:

1. Improve Grade Point Average
2. Increase Number of Students Taking the SAT/ACT & Improved Scores on Tests
3. Increase Graduation Rate & Opportunities for Higher Education
4. Enhance Life Skills Development
5. Increase Opportunities for Community Service
6. Increase Parental & Family Involvement

The measures of success are all examples of raising expectations and setting clear goals in order to enhance skills in developing an approach to excellence in academics and in life. (Van Gordon et al., 2009)

### **Setting**

The study takes place with former high school football players from economically disadvantaged high schools nationwide that were granted the Play It Smart Program between 2003 and 2007. These student-athletes will share their individual experiences in the program that have had a long-term effect.

### **Research Questions**

How do former participants in the Play It Smart Program describe the academic and sociological contribution the program made to their life during and after high school? And, how have these experiences shaped their education beyond high school?

### **Assumptions**

As a former academic coach for the National Football Foundation, I have observed the positive results of Play It Smart and the Pygmalion effect firsthand. A

majority of the Play It Smart programs nationwide have lost their funding in recent years, and I intend for this study to lead to a deeper understanding of its success that may in turn open new doors for funding. Comparable outcomes have been duplicated at each high school that implemented the Play It Smart Program, for student-athletes at each of the 170 schools had higher graduation rates, higher team GPA's, and higher college attendance rates than non-participants in the program (Van Gordon et al., 2009).

### **Limitations**

The data collected will be used to create a follow-up to the senior exit interviews that each Play It Smart academic coach conducted with the 12<sup>th</sup> graders before they graduated. Play It Smart provides academic support services for high school football teams; so, the overall program is designed to enhance the student-athlete experience, especially those in the at-risk category.

While they are not always perceived as such, high school student-athletes who are not considered at-risk statistically have higher grade point averages, higher graduation rates, lower truancy rates, lower drop-out rates, and less disciplinary violations at school than non-athletes (Fox et al., 2010; Franklin, 2006; Intrator, 2008; Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011; Rhea & Lantz, 2004). That being said, Play It Smart academic coaches are assigned to work with high school football teams in at-risk or under-served schools in order to level the playing field for these student-athletes.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study will report long-term individual academic and sociological experiences from the student-athlete perspective and does not address the overall team impact of the Play It Smart Program. Previous research was conducted by Van Gordon, Cornelius, and

Petitpas using the standard senior exit interviews where high school football players reflect upon the program in the May of their senior years. This study will research long-term effects of working with an academic coach through the Play It Smart Program.

### **Definitions**

*At-risk* – broadly defined as a lack of guidance in more than one area of life; also termed as high-risk or high-need in various literatures

*Initial eligibility* – the process of obtaining athletic eligibility during high school to compete in athletics as a college freshman

*NCAA* – National Collegiate Athletic Association

*High Risk Sports* – boys'/men's basketball and football teams

*Sliding Scale* – NCAA criteria where the higher the GPA a student has earned, the lower of an ACT/SAT score necessary to gain initial eligibility and vice versa. A 2.0 GPA is the lowest acceptable GPA and that must be combined with the highest ACT/SAT score on the sliding scale in order to gain initial eligibility.

*Support services* – resources provided at school to assist students or parents with academic, social, emotional, or psychological issues

### **Summary**

The purpose of studying the academic and sociological impact of participation in the National Football Foundation's Play It Smart Program is to increase awareness for how Play It Smart created an effective program for high school student-athletes with a life-long impact. Both donors and educators who work with at-risk student-athletes may use the study to further support the program.

## Chapter 2

### **Literature Review**

The National Federation of State High School Associations reports that around 7 million high school students in the United States participate in athletics each year (Gilbert et al., 2006; Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011). Organized sports were originally incorporated into American education to implement physical fitness programming for all students in order to develop both the mind and body (Davis, 2009). Today's form of high school competition is much more specialized and demanding. It holds abundant opportunities to teach life skills and character development in addition to fundamental athletic and academic skills (Holt et al., 2008). Further, some high school administrations are initiating sports psychology components into their curriculum to address current topics specific for student-athletes and coaches (Danish et al., 2005; Gilbert et al., 2006; Weissman, 2005).

These additional resources are beneficial because student-athletes with a strong support system are more likely to graduate from high school with adequate preparations. With clear guidance and realistic expectations presented throughout a high school athletic career, these adolescents will be exposed to life skills necessary for a variety of post-graduation options. A combination of life skills instruction and sports psychology can create a heightened level of awareness and more well-rounded student-athlete who is ready to face life after high school (Gilbert et al., 2006).

### **Realities for Student-Athletes**

Of the millions of student-athletes who participate in high school sports, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) reports that an average of 2 out of

every 100 play on college teams, with approximately 35,000 freshmen roster positions (Lubker & Etzel, 2007). Yet disproportionately, many high school athletes believe that they will indeed play at the college level and then obtain a career as a professional athlete (Intrator, 2008). A recent study by Lubker and Etzel found that some former high school athletes have a more difficult time adjusting to college socially and academically than non-athletes and college athletes due to their disengagement from the team setting, especially when it is not by choice. Apart from a team, which formerly provided a built in social network and support system, these student-athletes are at risk of experiencing increased isolation as well as resentment from ineligibility or from not being selected to participate in a collegiate program (2007).

Coaches and counselors who work with high school student-athletes should teach that the mental and social skills learned through sports are just as important as the physical skills (Gilbert et al., 2006 & Weissman, 2005). They have the ability to enhance positive self-concept and make a difference both on and off the playing field for these young adults by developing the total athlete (Danish, 2005; Hold et al., 2008; Intrator, 2008; Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011; Wyatt, 2009).

### **Life Skills and Character Development for Student-Athletes**

According to Danish, life skills are defined as “those skills that enable students to succeed in the different environments in which they live, such as school, home, and in their neighborhoods.” Life skills encompass behavioral, cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that can be transferred from participation in a sport to life outside of athletics (2005). Due to the nature of coaching, it is an ideal venue to further develop traits of character, self-esteem, confidence, respect for others, fair play, and competition,



which are basic values that will enrich relationships on a team and throughout life (Rhea & Lantz, 2004).

Through modeling positive behaviors, coaches are demonstrating how to act appropriately in different situations at school as well as in the sports arena (Holt et al., 2008; Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011). While many coaches face time restraints and a tremendous pressure to win, character development cannot be dismissed from coaching (Weissman, 2005). The philosophy at the Life Skills Center at Virginia Commonwealth University is:

“We believe that teaching athletic skills without life skills sends the wrong message to adolescents. It reinforces the belief that their world can change if they become better athletes” (Danish et al., 2005).

While modeling is effective, actively teaching life skills in a classroom setting further demonstrates the impact of their overall importance (Davis, 2009).

Attributes such as respect, responsibility, teamwork, accountability, time management, conflict resolution, leadership, resilience, tolerance, coping skills, peer pressure, self-control, cooperation, goal-setting, and effective communication are all examples of life skills that student-athletes can learn through participation on a team (Davis, 2009; Gilbert et al., 2006; Holt et al., 2008; Intrator, 2008; Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011; Rhea & Lantz, 2004; Weissman, 2005; Wyatt, 2009). Considered “soft skills” or “habits of the mind” by Intrator, students who develop these core skills are more apt to thrive in both the college setting and the workplace after graduation (2008). These qualities can empower adolescents to be in control of their education, enhance their home lives, and provide direction for their careers as adults (Wyatt, 2009).

Positive youth development focuses on physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social domains which can all be addressed by actively incorporating life skills into sports (Danish et al., 2005; Holt et al., 2008; Intrator, 2008; Lumpkin & Stokowski, 2011). In summary, the goal of life skill instruction for adolescents is to learn how to, “*work well, play well, love well, think well, serve well, be well*” (Danish et al., 2005).

### **Sports Psychology in High Schools**

As many high school guidance departments have large caseloads, some school psychology departments have incorporated sport psychology consultation (Gilbert et al., 2006; Weissman, 2005). Weissman developed one such program in New Jersey because he found that “meeting the psychological, developmental, and emotional needs of student-athletes is an important, yet missing component, especially at the high school level” (2005). Another researched group of urban student-athletes in California had “accepted a culture of losing” and lacked direction for the future (Gilbert et al., 2006). These low expectations became a self-fulfilling prophecy as seen in the Pygmalion effect motivation theory of Rosenthal and Jacobson (Beryanek, 2010). Elite high school student-athletes who do not go on to play a college sport can also be provided support and resources through sport psychology during the team disengagement process in order to develop a successful transition into the college setting (Lubker and Etzel, 2007).

In addition to offering services exclusive for student-athletes, sport psychologists can also assist with the professional development of the coaching staff to ensure that life skills are effectively instilled to develop self-esteem, identity, and feelings of competence (Danish et al., 2005). By working with coaches and athletes together, the level of

awareness and application for sport psychology concepts is greatly enhanced (Gilbert et al., 2006). Ongoing professional development of coaches is an indirect service for student-athletes because:

“Coaches must motivate themselves, inspire others, and create conditions for their players to learn about themselves. Coaches practice and deploy many of the skills indispensable for success in the classroom and the world of work. A coaching curriculum that teaches this skill set and attempts to help youths internalize achievement behaviors and values can hypothetically promote success in a variety of venues, including school” (Intrator, 2008)

Sport psychology is a unique way to address current issues for student-athletes and coaches while promoting life skill and character development (Weissman, 2005).

### **Summary**

In order to achieve positive youth development through sport, those who work with student-athletes must aim to prepare them for life after high school with realistic expectations and adequate life skills. The use of character development in athletics and sport psychology initiatives can increase awareness for student-athletes and by extension improve the educational setting for the entire student body.

## Chapter 3

### **Methodology**

#### **Population**

The population of the study includes former high school football players who participated in the National Football Foundation's Play It Smart Program between 2003 and 2007. These young men attended high school across the United States in at-risk or under-served communities where the program was granted.

#### **Sample**

A single-stage sampling procedure will be compiled from the record of parent consent forms signed in order to participate in the Play It Smart Program each school year between 2003 and 2007. Consent forms are on file at the Center for Youth Development and Research at Springfield College in Massachusetts. Interviews will be set up with the students who respond by the deadline.

#### **Data Collection**

Qualitative data will be collected by way of telephone interviews. Initial contact and interviews with student-athletes will take place during February 2012. The researcher will review and analyze data during March 2012. IRB Training was completed by the researcher in March 2011.

#### **Procedures and Data Analysis**

In effort to discover long-term academic and sociological impacts of participation in the National Football Foundation's Play It Smart Program, this study utilizes a telephone interview format with open-ended questions. The researcher will record the

conversations and analyze data by systematic coding and interpretation. The following four questions will be asked during the telephone interviews with former players:

- 1) What components of the Play It Smart Program were helpful for you?
- 2) How was Play It Smart different from other programs in your school?
- 3) How did Play It Smart shape your outlook on education after high school?
- 4) What did you learn through the program that applies to your life today?

### **Ethics**

Ethical and legal issues of gender equality in public education are outlined in Title IX federal legislation in terms of offering equal services to both boys' and girls' teams. Even though more boys than girls are typically found to be at-risk - especially in revenue sports - it is critical that support services offered through a school, and not an outside agency like the National Football Foundation, are offered inclusively to all extra-curricular programs. Since Play It Smart is not funded by the school district, it can offer academic support services solely to football teams without being in violation of Title IX.

### **Summary**

By studying academic and social influences that the Play It Smart program instilled upon high school football players, the researcher hopes to gain additional insight into long-term effects of participation in the program.

## Chapter 4

### **Research and Discussion**

The National Football Foundation's Play It Smart Program provides academic coaches to work with and mentor high school football teams nationwide. The following research expands current research by studying the long-term academic and sociological effects from the perspective of former high school student-athletes. The results and discussion sections are included in this chapter.

### **Results**

The researcher conducted telephone interviews with eight former football players who participated in the Play It Smart Program from 2003-2007. The young men were asked open-ended questions about their experiences in the Play It Smart Program and how the program curriculum applied to their life beyond high school. While some of the individual answers varied, common themes emerged when the interviews were transcribed and coded. Each student-athlete specifically mentioned that the main reason he went to college was the Play It Smart Program.

**Six measure of success.** While implementing the Play It Smart Program, the academic coach uses these six measures of success within each school as follows:

1. Improve Grade Point Average
2. Increase Number of Students Taking the SAT/ACT & Improved Test Scores
3. Increase Graduation Rate & Opportunities for Higher Education
4. Enhance Life Skills Development
5. Increase Opportunities for Community Service
6. Increase Parental & Family Involvement

These measures of success are easily monitored during high school and through the senior exit interviews. The current study of long-term results exemplifies that the six measures of the Play It Smart program are effective and lasting objectives.

**Analysis of interview responses.** Since open-ended questions were explored during the individual interviews, it is interesting to find that an equal number of responses both fell into the academic and sociological categories of coding the responses. It further supports the well-roundedness of the Play It Smart Program both during high school and considering the long-term influence into adulthood. Each of the academic and sociological responses are also considered transferrable life skills as conveyed through the program.

**Long-term academic results.** The interviews with former participants in the Play It Smart program were transcribed and coded similarly, and each of the long-term academic results listed below were mentioned in multiple interviews. These long-term outcomes coincide with the academic goals of the program and carry over into higher education, the military, and workforce. The responses were clear that the following skills used in college and adulthood were learned from the Play It Smart Program:

- Study skills and note-taking
- Setting goals
- Time management and organization
- Applying oneself toward quality work
- Staying focused
- Understanding the value of education

The long-term academic outcomes are a wonderful supplement to the sociological results.

**Long-term sociological results.** The former high school student-athletes who were interviewed also discussed the sociological impact that the Play It Smart program continues to have on their lives as an adult. These young men shared attributes that have a personal influence as well as an extension into relationships within their families, careers, and communities. The following skills learned in Play It Smart have carried over into the lives of former participants still today:

- Self-confidence
- Preparation for post-graduation transitions
- Wanting to give back
- Diligence and perseverance
- Teamwork and togetherness
- Communication skills

These long-term life skills are a strong addition to the academic results, which together provide a comprehensive outlook on some of the lasting effects of participation in the Play It Smart Program.

#### **Comments from Interviews**

The interviews with former student-athletes in Play It Smart provided firsthand information to support how the program impacted their life not only in high school but into their adult lives. The feedback ranges between the academic and sociologic responses.

- “It gave (to) a lot of kids who may not be thinking that college may be an actual option or an opportunity. And it gives you a chance to look at yourself and see that you can do more than what you maybe thought that you could. It gives a lot of kids the opportunity to become more than what they were initially thinking.”



- “With the skills that I learned back in high school through the program - set goals for yourself and stay focused - you know, it opened my eyes that there’s a lot more out there that you could be doing than what you are doing right now. Also, set a plan for myself... That drive inspired me to get out there and try.”
- “It prepared you. It gave you more to prepare for the transition from high school to college or the transition from high school to the real world.”
- “Even in the military, I have to go to Corporal’s course and the same study skills I learned back in Play It Smart I use in Corporal’s course. The note-taking skills that I’ve learned, going to class, taking notes in class, going home and studying the lesson all over again, and then doing the homework that they assign. So, the skills helped a lot with me.”
- “It gave me a sense of preparation and I knew what to expect.”
- “I know when I went to study hall, I didn’t necessarily want to do my homework and going to study hall forced me to do my homework. So, it made me want to stick with something I might not want to do. It’s worth something.”
- “The early morning study halls and the middle of the day study halls...it helped out a lot because it gave us time. When we were doing our work, we were around our teammates, so we were all doing it together.”
- “You really have to apply yourself and do what you have to do to get the results you want. And that’s how I looked at it going through Play It Smart.”
- “I thought about team more...not just my sports team, but everybody at school.”
- “It encouraged me to go to college, because at first I wasn’t really thinking about it. Play It Smart enlightened me to think about going to school.”

- “Teamwork. Especially at my job and the things that we have to do together, it’s all about communication and about helping each other and making sure we accomplish the task for that day. Play It Smart definitely prepared me for the real world.”
- “It just basically gave me a brighter future. It made me look forward to what’s out there.”
- “It definitely made me want to give back after I went through the program.”
- “The work you put in...it will pay off in the end if you are diligent in what you are trying to get accomplished and if you have the right mindset.”

## **Discussion**

Within the long-term academic and sociological effects that were cited in the interviews, each student-athlete mentioned core life skills that apply to their life today which trace back to working with a Play It Smart academic coach. “Perseverance,” “diligence,” “giving back,” “applying yourself,” “manifesting opportunities,” “keeping the right mindset,” “staying focused,” “setting goals,” and “better people skills” are all specific life skills that were cited as learned through the program.

In hindsight, many stated how they realize the value of education as well as the benefit of organization and study halls. Another common theme was quality work as expressed in the comments like, “take your time,” “do a good job at whatever you do,” “take things one at a time,” “apply yourself,” and “the work you put in will pay off.” One insightful young man even said, “Make it happen, or you’ll be left behind.”

**Guidance and mentorship from academic coach.** While the academic and sociological long-term effects of Play It Smart were the focus of this study, the former student-athletes shared a depth of information that fell into those two categories. While looking at the long-term effects of the Play It Smart Program, it is also necessary to

consider the impact during high school for greater understanding of the long-term carryover of the program.

Since the National Football Foundation's Play It Smart is granted to schools in at-risk or under-served communities, it is noteworthy to identify how the student-athletes interviewed also mentioned the specific role that the academic coach played in guiding their decision-making both in high school and carrying over after graduation. As previously mentioned, the term "at-risk" can be defined as *a lack of guidance in one or more areas of a person's life*. Further, the former players each discuss in their own terms the influence of the academic coach as an integral component of the program. It is important to include this aspect toward long-term results because the academic coach helped create accountability and rapport along with a heightened awareness level of life skills and decision-making skills for personal, academic, and social situations.

The following comments specifically referring to an academic coach were made during the student-athlete interviews:

- "Our academic coach helped us out a lot, more than any other program at the school."
- "I attribute going to college to Play It Smart. I had no intentions of going until Play It Smart."
- "Having an academic coach really helps out. It's very beneficial whether you just go because you want to be a part of that team or whether you really want to get your grades together. It's time well spent. It gives you a little more time to make you see that I do have the time."
- "It helped me out because I probably wouldn't have graduated or wouldn't have made the grades I did to the point that (academic coach) really helped us out where we needed help and everything."

- “That program is probably the single reason why I went to college. Without (academic coach) helping me fill out my FAFSA and stuff like that. And without (academic coach) and the program, I probably wouldn’t have gone to college and wouldn’t have played college football.”
- “I really can’t see me going to school if (academic coach) weren’t around. I owe a lot of where I am at right now to (academic coach) and that program.”
- “(Academic Coach) was real helpful to us, a lot of us really appreciate what she did for us. And without that help, we probably wouldn’t be where we are at today. We were just talking about that the other day how much she helped us out...a lot of us still hang together.”
- “If I never met (academic coach) or had Play It Smart at our school, I don’t think I ever would have thought about college. You can’t just think about it. It’s a lot. You have to be willing to do it, and some people aren’t willing to do the work.”
- “At first I didn’t know what to expect...I didn’t know what I was going to do after high school until I met (academic coach). That’s the honest truth. Afterwards, I just knew I wanted to be in school.”

## **Summary**

The former student-athletes who participated in the National Football Foundation’s Play it Smart Program clearly expressed examples of how the Pygmalion effect motivational theory holds true. As also evidenced in original studies from Rosenthal and Jacobson (Buryanek, 2010), the current data indeed supports that when more is expected, more is achieved.

## Chapter 5

### **Conclusions**

As a follow-up to the original Play It Smart senior exit interviews, the researcher conducted interviews with former participants in the program to determine long-term results. Each of the former players talked about the influence their academic coach had on various areas of their life in high school as well as transferrable life skills that they still use today. The National Football Foundation's Play It Smart Program showcases a sound format for enhancing the experience of high school student-athletes.

### **Educational Implications**

The Play It Smart Program implemented a very effective model through an on-site academic coach, which produced both immediate and long-term results as detailed in this study. Since much of the nationwide funding for the Play It Smart Program has been reduced, this study further supports the current data collected from the senior exit interviews. It is clear that former participants are still reaping benefits from the seeds that were sown in high school through involvement in the program. Play It Smart filled a critical void in the lives of these young men by providing both academic and social guidance. These transferrable life skills that were expressed in the interviews have carried over from high school into their adult lives.

Extraordinarily, the Play It Smart Program continues to influence the lives of its former participants because the life skills that were taught through academics and sports are transferrable into other phases of life as well. The Play It Smart Program is not only a program that works during the high school years, it is a program that influences high school student-athletes throughout their lives.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Beginning in Fall 2012, the NCAA increased initial eligibility standards for the high school Class of 2016. The minimum GPA for incoming college freshmen student-athletes in Fall 2016 is now a 2.3 with an increased GPA/SAT/ACT sliding scale as well. This increase in base standards supports that academic achievement is a priority for students-athletes. By the NCAA taking steps to increase academic eligibility guidelines, it further highlights the need and use for high school academic coaches in under-resourced or at-risk communities to help student-athletes reach these higher expectations and standards of excellence.

For future research, it would be interesting to see the direct short-term and long-term effects of this policy on high school student-athletes and collegiate eligibility. It will also be interesting to compare state high school eligibility standards and those states that may or may not follow suit to change baseline athletic eligibility criteria. Another noteworthy area of future research would be to study the Class of 2016 (or beyond) by tracking their academic progression and transition into college classes in order to see if indeed these student-athletes are truly more prepared for college. It would be worthwhile to see if the academic achievement gap between at-risk student-athletes and non-athletes at the college level has lessened due to the higher standards of eligibility.

### **Summary**

The National Football Foundation's Play It Smart Program not only upholds its six measures of success during high school, the program continues to affect the lives of its former participants into adulthood. The long-term academic and sociologic influences

of Play It Smart and the academic coach are continuing to level the playing field for student-athletes from at-risk communities across the nation.

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